

Editorial

The organisational challenge of the 21st century: new paradigms, new practices



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Last month a colleague and I sat in a government-run special education needs school in Pakistan watching the work of a locally trained speech, language and communication therapist with a large group of children with very few resources. Our concern with the scarcity of assessment and diagnosis materials, equipment and largely inappropriate intervention techniques was noted by the Principal who told us how hard she had to lobby city officials for even the most basic equipment. Over dinner that evening I began to consider how the school's fortunes might be enhanced by turning it into a social enterprise rather than a far flung outpost of the local education authority. Back in the UK, I have also suggested that some departments within Anglia Ruskin University might also benefit from becoming social enterprises too! I believe social enterprises should be organisations established to achieve a tangible social purpose – ideally with a triple bottom line (social, environmental and financial) result flowing from a variety of blended value investments. For example, check out Strive Masiyiwa from Zimbabwe and his business Econet Wireless who focuses as much on his business as on social and community enterprise!

Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801–1885), 7th Earl of Shaftesbury has been an inspiration to me for some years. He was a realist. He avoided quick fixes. He had clarity, courage and integrity whilst pioneering sustainable change. He viewed employees not as commodities, but as important stakeholders. He attacked social exclusion, and made beggars entrepreneurs by helping them start small businesses. His vision was to use education to bring about long-term economic and social prosperity.

Helping to achieve social purpose via enterprise is now firmly on the political, financial and societal agendas throughout the world. Last month, in a first for the UK, the University of Glasgow offered its Intellectual Property – including ground-breaking medical and scientific research – to business and entrepreneurs free of charge.

University College London has also recently made a video archive of lectures and presentations available online to view free of charge, and an increasing number of commercial organisations are becoming focused on 'the right way to do business'. Indeed Walmart quickly woke up to the issues posed by climate change when it lost 100 stores in Hurricane Katrina. However, chief executives still report a lack of interest in social enterprise and sustainability. According to a survey by Accenture for the 2010 United Nations Global Compact only 12% cite pressure from investors as being a driving factor on social enterprise and sustainability issues – whereas 72% still cite brand, trust and reputation. Incorporating sustainability factors into current business and valuation models remains a challenge, but I suggest that all organisations need to track the impact of social enterprise and sustainability on their core metrics and become increasingly proactive in shaping attitudes and mindsets of current and future investors – and stakeholders.

In this issue of *Interconnections*, we bring to your attention several perspectives to show that this level of change, while challenging current practices, is going to be necessary if educational bodies and organisations are to survive in the future. Bronwen Rees opens by suggesting that a new paradigm would mean moving from a quantitative approach to one that is qualitative. Jack Reardon considers the current concepts of economics and how the values used to measure progress need to change to take into account energy as well as economy. Kim Gould then proposes what new 'quantum businesses' might look like.

John Nirenberg then suggests how we might create 'communities of practice' in our organisations through creative collaboration and networking. Malachi Udensi dispels the myth of the MBA, and discusses how he needed to make significant adjustments to his thinking when setting up a business in Nigeria. Zoltán Csörgő discusses how 'traditions' of communities can be beneficially incorporated into organisational life. Jasper Garland discusses how the issue of climate change is confused by the media discourse and shows how the former war-time government advertising engendered rapid change in public opinion. He suggests businesses could contribute to this.

Finally, in the research and practice section, a discussion at the East West sanctuary in Budapest, lead by Gergely Csutoros, focuses on the nature of community and economy in Hungary. Joel Magnuson completes this edition with an economic perspective on the ecological conundrum of capitalism.